

Whiskey	+ H ₂ O	—> Intoxication
Gin	+ H ₂ O	—> Intoxication
Scotch	+ H ₂ O	—> Intoxication
Rye	+ H ₂ O	—> Intoxication
Vodka	+ H ₂ O	—> Intoxication
Wine	+ H ₂ O	—> Intoxication
Brandy	+ H ₂ O	—> Intoxication

Since the two elements that these cases share are H₂O and intoxication, you might erroneously conclude that H₂O can cause intoxication. Of course, even a very cursory examination of the cases reveals that H₂O and intoxication are not the only elements that the cases share. This example illustrates the principle that the method of agreement may be erroneous when other, perhaps unknown or hidden, elements are present in each of the cases. This error in reasoning is likely to occur when using the method of agreement, as the sole method of supporting a cause-and-effect argument and when you do not examine multiple causes of an effect sufficiently.

The method of difference can be used as a supplement to the method of agreement. Unlike the method of agreement, in which the debater presents cases where both the cause and effect are present, the method of difference requires examples in which both the suspected cause and the suspected effect are absent. To illustrate the method of difference, let's begin with the earlier example of berry mulching. In the method of agreement, the gardener and you noticed the presence of both mulching and large, sweet berries. Now, to argue using the method of difference, you might present other examples where both features are absent; in other words, examples of gardens that were not mulched that grew smaller, tarter berries. By combining examples where both the supposed cause and the supposed effect are present with examples where both are absent, you are able to make a better argument that mulching is the cause of better berries.

Now let's apply the method of difference to the case of the proposition of women's rights. Using the method of agreement, you could present examples where both separation of the public and private spheres and diminished women's rights are present. Using the method of difference, you would search for other examples where both elements are absent. Accordingly, you could give examples of areas of life or examples of countries where the separation of public and private spheres does not exist and demonstrate that, in these cases, violations of women's rights are absent as well. If you can combine examples where both elements are present with other examples where both elements are absent, your case that one element (separation of public and private) causes the other (diminished women's rights) is strengthened.

You can use the method of difference to check the validity of the method of agreement because it can display errors created by the sole use of the method of agreement. Using our example of H₂O causing intoxication, you could test the causal relationship by removing the H₂O from all of the drinks. Having people drink whiskey, gin, scotch, rye, vodka, wine, and brandy without H₂O would lead to the discovery that H₂O is not the cause of intoxication.